



The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

Lausanne Occasional Paper 15 Christian Witness to Buddhists

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Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization

Mini-Consultation on Reaching Buddhists

held at Pattaya, Thailand from 16-27 June 1980

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Prefatory Note

This report, Christian Witness to Buddhists, is one of a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) emerging from the historic Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980. The report was drafted by members of the "Mini-Consultation on Reaching Buddhists" under the chairmanship of Rev. Lakshman Peiris, who also served as International Co-ordinator of the pre-COWE study groups on Buddhists.

The major part of this report went through a draft and a revised draft, which involved all members of the mini-consultation. It was also submitted to a wider "sub-plenary" group for comment, but the responsibility for the final text rests with the mini-consultation and its chairman.

The report is released with the prayer and hope that it will stimulate the church and individual members in reaching this large segment of the population.

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Introduction

This report deals with the two basic schools of Buddhist thought: Theravada (Hinayana, the Southern Schools) and Mahayana (the Northern Schools).

Representatives taking part in the study group came from Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Japan, and Korea, as well as from countries such as Brazil and the United States, where small communities of expatriate Buddhists and their converts are found.

The *problem* motivating the study was that, except in Korea where a strong indigenous concept of God (Hananim) similar to the Lord of the Bible existed, only comparatively small numbers of Buddhists have responded to the gospel of Christ. For example, Christians make up less than one per cent of the population in Japan and Thailand.

Christian encounter with Buddhists can be traced back to the Nestorian period. Despite continual Christian witness since that time, early Roman Catholic missions and later Protestant efforts produced only meager results in terms of church growth. In fact, some of the earlier missions to Buddhist peoples in Asia did not even survive.

Three main causes accounted for the lack of permanent self-perpetuating Christian communities among Buddhist peoples: persecution, syncretism, and the failure of the church to break through the social solidarity of Buddhist communities. These still pose basic problems facing Christian missiologists and evangelists today.

The goal of the study was to evaluate the task of reaching Buddhists and to determine principles which would foster the ongoing development of effective strategies to reach Buddhists in the above lands. Christ's Great Commission gives Christians a mandate to take the gospel to every person, including the large number of Buddhist peoples. Since we understand that Buddhists are seeking truth, and because Jesus Christ is "the Truth," we are doubly bound to declare the gospel to them.

A basic *assumption* of the study is that, while recognising the need to develop practical, effective strategies for reaching Buddhists, we acknowledge that this task of evangelism is ultimately God's doing. We, therefore, affirm our dependence on God's grace.

1. The World of the Buddhist

A. Geographical Location of Buddhists

Today, millions in Tibet, Japan, Korea, China, and Southeast and Southern Asia are adherents of some form of Buddhism, usually intermixed with animism and sometimes tempered by modern secularistic materialism.

Peoples influenced by Buddhist thinking comprise one of the largest blocks of unreached peoples in 1980, claiming over a billion people—a quarter of the world's population and a third of the unevangelized. This includes mainland Chinese as well as about, 400 million other Asians committed to some form of Buddhism. It is unlikely that, during the last three decades, centuries of Buddhist philosophical thinking in China have been erased. Changes have occurred, but Buddhist conceptualisations mixed with various spiritistic beliefs still permeate the thinking of that great nation today.

B. Historical Background

In its 2,500-year history, Buddhism has been one of the great religions of the world. The main expansion occurred during its first two millennia. Kenneth S. Latourette observed that its growth among people of high civilisation or advanced religion did not fully displace its religious predecessors. It was mostly among peoples "where the prevailing religion was animism that Buddhism became dominant" with the exception of Hindu lands. Buddhism has made no significant geographical expansion in the last five centuries. Revitalisation and missionary movements of Buddhism are currently on the increase.

Beginning in India with Gautama Buddha and his teachings (6th century B.C.), Buddhism subsequently found a home in many other lands of Asia. The early division into Theravada and Mahayana sections has been expanded into numerous schools and sects today—especially in Japan, where such groupings as the Pure Land, Nichiren, Zen, True Word, and other sects have flourished.

Because of major divergences between Theravada and Mahayana schools, this paper will be divided into two major sections. We will proceed with Theravada first, to be followed later by discussions on Mahayana.

2. Theravada Buddhism

A. World Views of Theravada Buddhists

The pervasiveness of Buddhism affects the people's outlook on philosophy, education, values, and all areas. Thus Buddhism and the culture of the people are so interwoven as to be almost synonymous. Herein lies the foundation of the people's identity and of social solidarity. People are born into their religio-cultural societies, not made members by personal choice or decision.

In the world view of Theravada Buddhists, however, there is a distinction between intellectual and popular Buddhism, between ideal and real culture. Some of the basic tenets of the Buddhist's ideal world view are:

- (i) *Lack of a concept of the Judea-Christian God (non-theistic)*
- (ii) *A strong ingrained belief in Karma (cause and effect) and rebirth (repeated incarnations)*
- (iii) *A circular, rather than linear view of life and history*
- (iv) *A concept of non-soul or non-self (Anatta)*
- (v) *An ultimate hope of nirvana, variously defined as annihilation (non existence) or bliss.*

Buddhists at the popular level, however, often seek help through supernatural beings (spirits) and objects. They also incorporate a belief in an after life.

B. Crucial Theological Issues

We recognise some historical and doctrinal similarities between Christianity and Theravada Buddhism: for example, the similarity of ethical standards between the Ten Commandments and the Buddhist *sila* abstentions. These moral absolutes are useful stepping-stones to lead Buddhists from where they are to encounters with the gospel. For example, the Christian evangelist might encourage the Buddhist to try keeping his ethical system fully without fault. Continuing to be contacted by the evangelist from time to time, the Buddhist would be led eventually to admit the impossibility of this task. Then the Buddhist becomes open to the gospel of grace in Christ. Other points of similarities could be researched and listed as possible stepping-stones to the gospel.

The Christian's basic concern, however, is not to compare religious systems *per se* but to lead men to know Christ, who is the "end of the law." Christ alone is the solution to man's problem (Rom. 10: 3-4). The focus is changed from the comparative synthesis of religions to dynamic interaction with the supernatural person of God.

Communicating the person of Christ, not Christianity as a religion, is our task. When examined overall, the similarities between Christianity and Theravada Buddhism are "in either its classical or modified animistic forms" are largely superficial. The differences are crucial at the belief (theological) level. Latourette says that these differences are "so clear cut and so great that no reconciliation can be effected, that does not do such violence to one or both that they are deprived of their fundamental teaching." He concludes: "Both Buddhism and Christianity cannot be true."

The major difference is in the principle of salvation or ultimate attainment. For Theravada Buddhists, *self-effort, deliverance through their own human energy and ability*, is a cardinal principle. Depend only on self, they say. The gospel, on the other hand, declares that dependence on self and confidence in the flesh spells doom.

We are utterly helpless apart from the grace of God in Christ alone. Salvation comes through dependence on Almighty God, made operational through the penitent's faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:20, 3:7; Rom. 3:28, 4:1-28).

Theravada Buddhism basically teaches the ability of self to free oneself from corruption and suffering to obtain a state of perfect non-existence, without the help of God. Thus, in modern terms, the basis of Buddhism is humanism, which holds that man does not have to answer to a higher authority than himself; and human beings are not basically evil but can become good by their own efforts. Mankind can do this without any help from God, or any reference to God. Like other human-initiated religions, Buddhism is a striving of human beings after the ultimate.

Christianity, on the other hand, stems from God's self-disclosure to mankind. This divine revelation climaxed in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel, therefore, is centered in a transcendent God, revealing himself in terms of man's own culture and language and transforming men and consequently societies by divine grace to produce fruitful, righteous behaviour. That transformation is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Since *karma* encourages preoccupation with self-dependence, self-reliance is fundamental in the teaching of Buddhism. Self-reliance runs contrary to the contemporary human concept of progress which exists in Buddhist theory and practice. In the Bible, self-reliance is the basic ingredient of sin, since man in his self-centeredness separates himself from God. In several points, this contrast between Buddhist teaching and the gospel is seen.

Buddhism *rejects the concept of a personal God* and, for that matter, of any spiritual personality, either human or divine. God, in the Christian sense, is unknown to Buddhists. In place of a personal Creator, they uphold *karma* (cause and effect) as the exclusive principle to explain the universe. What or who initiated *karma* is undetermined. In modern times, God has been interpreted in Buddhist religious terminology. Again the danger in definitions and conceptualisations is to be discerned carefully. The following indicates subtle syncretism by taking the Christian word "God" into Buddhist writings, while maintaining a Buddhist understanding.

Bhikkhu Buddhahasa Indapanno, a leading Buddhist scholar, *equates* God with *karma*, rejecting personality in favour of "nature" as cause. In terms of comparison, not equivalence, this is reasonably acceptable thinking, although it begs the question of prime initiation. In gospel terms, God is the final point of orientation for all in his purposeful relation to the world. In Buddhism, the final cause is the principle of *karma*. Indapanno also equates "God the Creator" with the Buddhist term *avijja* (lack of knowledge, or ignorance, being the cause of evil). Hence God, in Buddhist terms, is ignorance, being the power of nature which caused all things to exist and, as such, causing suffering. Such an interpretation of God is absolutely unacceptable.

Buddhist *karma* tends to engender fatalism, hopelessness, self-excusing, and pessimism in the majority of the population. Theravada Buddhism has *no possibility of forgiveness*, for *karma* (especially in popular beliefs) is the iron law to which there is no exception or immediate escape. Contrast this with the gospel of the

loving God who grants forgiveness, hope and an exchanged life, operating in a spiritual dimension through the power of Jesus Christ's shed blood. Christ's atonement is sufficient for cleansing from the past, power in the present, and hope in the future. Christ's death is the basis on which a loving God gives forgiveness at great cost to himself. Thus God himself, in Christ, took man's place as a substitute to provide the way of liberation from sin and self, reconciling man to God.

Buddhism is centered in the individual. No provision is made for Buddhist community comparable to the Christian assembly (church). Buddhism lacks a sense of relation between man and man, and man and God. The existing social order is not directly influenced by Buddhist teaching. However, the Bible's teaching moves Christians into relatedness in community, where other-centeredness reaches out to others in Christ's love.

C. Vital Communicational Issues

(i) *Overcoming hindrances to effective communication*

The contextual barriers to cross-cultural communications (particularly to Buddhists) are many. The social solidarity caused by the integrative religious overlay is strong. The culture itself is deeply steeped in Theravada Buddhism. The religious and educational language is heavily infiltrated with Buddhistic terms, connotations, and concepts. The gospel, through its initial expansion, the Reformation, and evangelical awakenings, strongly influenced the moral base in many Western nations. Likewise, Buddhism tied together and strongly influenced the fragmented peoples of Asia, particularly those animistic populations in process of cultural change and group integration.

Among such peoples, Buddhistic concepts are fundamental to the thinking, operation, and attitudes of people, even though mixed with animistic beliefs. Thus theology, learned behaviour, and education at home or school are saturated with Buddhistic teaching. This religious overlay forms the framework or grid in which communication takes place. Christians must take account of this communication problem in presenting the gospel to Buddhists. Christians must not only study the Bible, but also study their hearers to see what they already believe. Christians must be like doctors who examine the patients before prescribing the cure.

Consider two major hindrances in this communication dilemma. *First*, many unwittingly believe that communication is what is said, rather than what is heard. How often we hear, "What a clear presentation of the gospel." Our main concern should really be: how clear was the reception? In Buddhist lands, the linguistic terms the Christian uses are inevitably loaded with Buddhistic meaning, and are often identical to the words Buddhist priests use. For example, the Thai word *baap* means to break one of the Theravada Buddhist *silas*, particularly killing life. When the Christian uses *baap*, he means sin as separation from God, falling short of God's glory. The conceptual difference between the two uses is considerable. Is it any wonder that Buddhists often reply, "Oh, if that is Christianity, it is just the same as Buddhism"? While the Christian understands the new meaning given to these words, he cannot take for granted that his Buddhist audience makes adjustments to the Christian meanings unknown to him.

Second, the frustration of the gospel proclaimer revolves around the fact that he *cannot transfer meaning*. The Christian may speak the message, but the Buddhist produces the meaning in his own mind. Therefore, the communicator can only transfer "bits" of information. The meaning is then formed in the mind of the hearer in terms of his own cultural grid. This is as true for a local Christian speaking to a Buddhist neighbour as for the cross-cultural missionary.

The *solution* demands an action to establish a cycle in the communicative process. Communication is not portrayed by a straight line. It is *not* a verbal echo or rebound of the actual words. It is more like a circle. Effective communication requires that the hearer understands the meaning intended by the communicator. Thus a feedback mechanism is essential for evaluating honest communication. Conversational interchange is helpful here, rather than just "pulpit announcing." Effective feedback is essential to establish clarity of meaning. Only as the specific meaning intended by the evangelist is reproduced in the mind of the hearer, can it be claimed the gospel has been proclaimed or taught.

Listening is therefore a vital part of the effective communication process, especially as Buddhist concepts are based on presuppositions and promises diametrically opposed to the gospel. The more interchange and *feedback to clarify meaning* occurs, the more likely biblical understanding is. This is heightened through continued and repeated interaction.

(ii) *Using meaningful indigenous media*

In many Asian cultures, especially rural and tribal ones, oral communication forms tend to predominate. The electronic and print media in such populations usually have low impact as local communicative media. Each culture has its own primary communication systems, such as indigenous song, dance, drama, music, and other arts. The best media for each culture should be used in evangelization. Use and adaptation of local media should be encouraged in all evangelism. In urban areas and some rural ones too, Western forms of media such as films and songs have been used indigenously. Christian communicators should carefully study the principles and process of indigenisation behind the acceptance of such media, and not glibly follow Western modes.

Every Christian should be concerned to find meaningful expressions and *indigenous illustrations*, stories, anecdotes applicable to communicating theological truth. Countless illustrations from daily life are pregnant with meaning, awaiting spiritual application. The evangelist should constantly be on the lookout for *key historical illustrations*. For example, the theological concept of substitution, which presupposes someone vicariously giving his life for another, is incongruous with Theravada Buddhist religious beliefs. A beautiful historical illustration of the Thai Queen Phrasiriyothai of the Ayuthia period helps open the windows of understanding here. Briefly stated, the Thai King went out to fight the opposing Burmese ruler. Phrasiriyothai dressed up and joined the King's ranks, disguised as a Thai warrior. Unknown to her royal husband, she rode out to the battle. In the ensuing fight, the Thai King was losing the advantage. He was about to be cut down. Seeing this, the Queen deliberately drove her elephant between the Burmese King and her husband. She was slain by the long-handled knife wielded by the Burmese ruler, but her husband escaped. He later built a special memorial to her in honour of her bravery and sacrifice. The gospel application is obvious.

The *use of parable, symbol, and analogy* is generally more acceptable to the Buddhist mind than are strictly focused arguments. Buddhist people are raised on such stories and are frequently quite adept at interpreting them with minimal or no explanation. Word pictures can be employed to advantage. The Bible is full of rich parables and illustrations, many of which speak for themselves to Buddhists. Parables or analogy are great ways to get the Buddhist to open up for discussion, thereby helping him evaluate the gospel's meaning.

To large sections of Theravada Buddhist populations, the majority of whom are rural, Pauline arguments in strict linear logic form, such as those in Romans, are difficult to follow. Their minds tend to be conditioned by a type of thinking that requires elaborate and continuous illustrations. The stories are like the spokes in a wheel, pointing to a common hub of meaning. Such an approach is used in the book of Hebrews. Studying the indigenous process of communication and utilising these principles for proclamation and teaching will probably be a crucial issue in effective evangelism.

Some Theravada Buddhist concepts, such as *karma* and *rebirth*, are ingrained and perpetuated by hearing legends repeatedly year after year, generation upon generation. Wall paintings in temples and poster paintings on festival decorations reinforce Buddhist philosophy. No amount of arguing will dislodge these beliefs. Other approaches are needed. Christians should employ strategies to introduce and reinforce Christian truths. For example, the great biblical epics of God's redeeming, leading, and preserving his people should be told repeatedly. They may also be portrayed in paintings, decorations, and cartoon-style books for wider distribution.

(iii) *Credibility of the communicator*

The credibility of the communicator is vital to the audience's *acceptance of his message as credible*. A sympathetic understanding of the Buddhist is needed. A Christian approach should always be with humility and loving persuasion, backed by the testimony of dynamic personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A living demonstration of the gospel, not a pharisaical preciseness of evangelical doctrines, is required. So the effectiveness of Christ's ambassadors will be proportionate to their dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, their sensitivity to the cultural concepts of those to whom they go, and their credibility among the people they are reaching.

To Buddhists, Theravada Buddhism is supreme and, when they are confronted with another religious way of life, they usually react either defensively or with hostility. Therefore, Christians have to commend themselves, and thereby the gospel, not as threats or challenges but as benefits and helps. This will be rather difficult, due to past attitudes such as arrogance and even intolerance by Christians. Therefore, we should build personal friendships with them and seek to serve them humbly and lovingly.

For example, a Christian pastor was walking home when he noticed a Buddhist neighbour trying to carry a heavy sack of rice. The Buddhists walked by the man

without helping, but the pastor stopped and assisted the man, carrying the sack up the hill, past the pastor's own home to the home of the man. The Buddhist was so surprised that a clergyman would help that his former opposition melted, and he later became a Christian, with his whole family.

(iv) Credibility of the church

The credibility of the church as a whole is a crucial issue in the effective communication of the gospel. Theravada Buddhists tend to see the church as foreign to their culture-an alien import. The church in its adoption of a set of foreign forms and expressions creates a crisis of credibility. This becomes an obstacle to gospel communicators. Buddhists feel they must adopt a foreign system of forms and expressions in order to become accepted members of the Christian community.

God is vitally interested in cultural credibility to the extent that he sent Jesus to "become flesh" and "dwell among us" so as to clearly communicate his word to us in "grace and truth." Our goal to communicate the gospel clearly to Buddhists requires that we attempt to establish the credibility of the church within each cultural context, by adopting culturally relevant forms and expressions for the church. As a result, the church will manifest itself in a variety of forms and expressions to be determined by the local context.

The church should consider carefully the use of culturally relevant terminology, forms of art, drama and national festivals in communicating the gospel, as well as indigenous forms of worship. For example, the expression of Christian hope in and through cultural funeral forms (adapted as necessary) provides great opportunity for positive Christian witness to Buddhists at Christian funerals.

D. Some Principles for Practical Strategies

(i) Spiritual powers

No strategy in reaching Theravada Buddhists can ignore the basic spiritual equipment spoken of in the Scriptures. The conflict with unseen demonic forces calls for earnest and concerned prayer, as well as the informed use of God's Word and the proclamation of Christ's true gospel. Dependence on God is essential.

(ii) Personnel

How shall they hear *without a preacher*? First, the key to evangelism is the lay Christian's consistent witness to relatives, neighbours, and friends. Training and encouragement of Christians in this is essential. Regular spiritual nurture of Christians will encourage a resurgence of evangelism. We should seek opportunities to move Christian families into areas without a Christian witness to evangelize and plant churches. When Christian families move, they can start new churches and cells in the homes.

Secondly, new missionary ventures are needed to evangelize unreached Buddhists. Both home missions and foreign missions from the Third World and the West are urgently needed. The role of missionaries working within strong churches is not to be confused with that of pioneer apostles to unreached peoples. There is a need for mission societies to focus on church planting primarily among Buddhist peoples.

(iii) Time for diffusion

Patience is needed when working with Buddhist peoples. A time for diffusion of the message is usually necessary. Gospel saturation finally helps break the barriers of ignorance. Few people in Asia know much about the true gospel, yet the evangelist often expects them to make an immediate decision for Christ. Rather, he should evaluate where each community is in relation to its degrees of awareness of the nature of the gospel. He can then decide what would be the most appropriate action to take next in leading them toward Christ and calling for decisions of families and individuals when they are ready. Baptism of an individual may be delayed so that the whole family can be won as the Word diffuses throughout the nuclear or extended family.

(iv) Family-focused evangelism

Evangelism of whole families, rather than evangelism of individuals, is vital. Social solidarity demands that whole families and groups of families be won for Christ if viable churches are to be planted and are to make an adequate impact on the community. The individual should be used to win the family.

(v) Clarity of goal

The process of "How shall they hear" is preceded by the goal that they might *believe in Christ*. Evangelism must aim finally at "making disciples." Thus the *planting of local churches* is fundamental. Effective evangelism should also be based in, and flow out of, local churches—both old and new ones. A good goal is a local church in each community and, thereby, the gospel to every person.

(vi) The power encounter approach

Rather than confronting Buddhism directly, the evangelist should note the powers of the demonic fear controlling the people in animistic practices. The message of Christ's power to liberate from evil spirits or from spiritual bondage should be emphasised. An apologetic approach may be helpful among the minority of philosophical and intellectual Buddhists, but power encounter is suitable for the majority. The action of a new believer in destroying those things which formerly held him in spiritual fear and bondage is a testimony both to himself and the community.

Although a Theravada Buddhist expects to rely on no one else, he often resorts to gods and demons for help. As a result, a great fear of demons exists among Theravada Buddhists, and the whole country openly shows evidence of being under the powers of spirits. People are also afraid and suspicious of each other, often generating demonic influence against one another. People resort to indigenous practitioners, such as spirit doctors or mediums, either to do harm to others or to ward off spells made against themselves. So, the *power* of Jesus over the demons and the triumph of the cross over the *power* of darkness is *good news* for the Buddhists to hear. The gospel provides power for deliverance and relief in their lives. Christians should look for opportunities of power encounter, and encourage them to take place, to destroy the binding effects of demon beliefs upon the people. We should declare the supremacy of the risen Christ over demonic powers and, through the name of Jesus, demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit, effecting deliverance of those who are bound under demon influence.

(vii) Social concern

Buddhists see Jesus Christ as a good man who went about doing good and showing compassion on the sick, the demon-possessed, and the needy and sinful. Pondering Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross, a thinking Buddhist convert said, "Jesus is unparalleled in human history; no one has loved as he loved."

Social concern and social welfare need to be carried out along with our evangelistic activities—spontaneously, without any strings attached. Social welfare ought to be carried out in needy communities quite naturally, whether they are inquirers or not. It is hoped that the loving climate created will see some turn to Christ.

Gospel preaching, literature, and dramas should reflect Christian principles of justice, righteousness, human dignity, equality, and freedom. They should be scrupulously free of party politics.

Missionaries of the past era, through many humanitarian actions, gave out much material aid. They freely helped people through hospitals, schools, and orphanages. This often produced many "rice Christians" with dependent attitudes. Today great care must be taken not to spoil new enquirers by unwittingly promoting financial dependence upon the church.

(viii) Reaching Buddhists in their social context

Theravada Buddhism provides cultural and national identity for Buddhists. Born into the system, they are automatically incorporated into Buddhism. Despite the joy of salvation, the result of believing in Christ is often traumatic. The problem is aggravated by the convert's joining the church, by which he often alienates himself from his family and friends, who look upon him as a traitor to the community.

The main results, therefore are:

- (a) The Christian believer is socially ostracised.
- (b) The antagonism of his family and community toward Christianity becomes a barrier to their evangelization.
- (c) Joining the church is interpreted as joining an alien community.

Christians must try to reach Buddhists in their natural setting without uprooting them from their family and cultural ties. Christians must identify with the people among whom they live, and should develop an indigenous pattern of life and Christian worship in these communities. Some strategies toward this are:

- (a) Establish and maintain rapport with the family of the enquirer early. Explain to them that the new believer remains a member of his family in the new community, even though he has transferred his faith to Jesus Christ. The change is inward and personal, not social or national.
- (b) Encourage the new convert to continue identification with his community and be involved in normal social life, observing national laws and festivals except where they compromise biblical truth. For example, Christians should join in wedding activities but refrain from actions such as worship of spirits or images.
- (c) Exhort the believer to be humble, loving, and responsible to his family.
- (d) Aim to win whole families to Christ simultaneously. If necessary, delay baptism of an individual in order to gain his whole family.

(ix) *Facilitating attitude change among Buddhists*

Christians must accept the unsavory fact that great fear of, and revulsion against, Christianity exists among Theravada Buddhists, partially due to incidents in past history—such as persecution of Buddhists under supposedly Christian European rulers. Since Christianity was introduced after Buddhism had been established, Theravada Buddhists consider it an alien threat. They fear that Christianity will erode the dominant hold Buddhism exercises over the people.

Christians must, therefore, employ strategies which change this negative attitude of Buddhists toward the gospel. Possible strategies are:

- (a) Build good relations with leading monks, since they are usually among the most influential men in the village.
- (b) Develop a friendly relationship with families in the community over a period of time.
- (c) Generally avoid high-powered evangelistic programmes and such direct confrontation until a receptive climate has been obtained. Often, much damage has resulted from premature attempts to convert those whose attitudes are negative and whose knowledge of the gospel is inadequate.
- (d) Build the confidence of Buddhists toward Christians by the latter's exemplary living and active social service (see social concern and credibility of the communicator already mentioned).
- (e) Gradually introduce Christian concepts through sensitive means of communication—such as films, literature, story telling, drama, and music appropriate to the community.

(x) *Methodology*

No specific methodology has been outlined here, because methods should be tailored to fit each situation of evangelization. Choice of methods, selection of media and tools should take into account the particular audience to be reached, the indigenous media best used for communicating among that people, and the principles of strategy suggested above. Some testing may be necessary to establish the best methodology for reaching a specific Buddhist people.

3. Mahayana Buddhism

Though various forms of Buddhism are also to be found in Tibet, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere, the focus of the following material (written by a small group) is on Japan. In that country, Mahayana has reached a full development and a pervasive influence.

A. The Mahayana World View

Mahayana shares the background of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism. Basic concepts are *karma*, rebirth, and enlightenment; and those connected with the Three Refuges, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-fold Path are part and parcel of the Mahayanist orientation. In spite of the fact that some schools such as Zen betray basic Theravada tendencies, however, certain distinctions of the Mahayana schools reveal a marked difference between them and the more conservative Theravada.

(i) *Buddha and the Buddha worlds*

- (a) For Mahayanists, Gautama Buddha is not so much looked upon as a saint as he is revered as a saviour. On earth he refused to enter *Nirvana* upon his enlightenment, but went about sharing his message. After death, in a variously defined continuing existence, he looks down upon the enslaved suffering creatures of this and other worlds and draws them toward himself.
- (b) The eternal Buddha eclipses the historical Buddha. The relationship between them is often explained in terms of the doctrine of the Triple Body: the Body of Transformation such as that of Gautama Buddha while on earth; the Body of Communal Enjoyment in which he enjoys blessedness and shares his "eternal light"; and the Body of Essence which is transcendent and yet immanent in the whole universe.
- (c) There are, in fact, numerous buddhas, each of whom presides over his own Buddha world; and there are numerous manifestations or incarnations (Bodies of Transformation) of the Buddha of this world. Some schools subscribe to a succession of Buddhas who have appeared through history to minister to the people of successive ages, and also to a Buddha yet to come.

(ii) *Man and his world*

- (a) In Mahayana, *anatta* (non-ego) doctrine is understood to mean that no being or thing exists permanently, but only as an everchanging inter-relationship of *skandhas* (collections or aggregates), which lend present but transitory form to existing phenomena and, in the cases of some, consciousness as well. Moreover, no existing being or thing exists in, of, or by itself. All are bound inextricably together.
- (b) The virtue which is key to Mahayana is not so much *bodhi* (enlightenment) as it is *karuna* (compassion). Enlightenment and peace are possible because the power of *Nirvana* already exists in every man, and because other beings exercise compassion and, in grace, stand ready to share their merit.
- (c) Rather than the *arahat* (perfected disciple) who forsakes all to accomplish his goal of Nirvana, the Mahayana ideal is the bodhisattva who shows compassion. As a corollary of this, apart from the Lama-oriented Mahayana of Tibet and adjacent areas, Mahayana tends to be more lay-oriented and less monk-oriented. The religious life can be lived while the devotee is very much a part of this world.
- (d) In Mahayana, meditation is accompanied by, and often superseded by, the prayers and petitions of faith.

Though the above constitutes some of the more salient features of the Mahayanist world view, it should be made clear that, unlike Theravada, most Mahayana schools have encouraged speculative inquiry and have accepted various scriptures in addition to the Pali Canon (Tripitaka). As a result of these factors and the influence of local religions and traditions encountered in its spread, Mahayana sometimes has yielded to a popular and largely unconscious syncretism. In other cases, the syncretism has been carefully thought through and promulgated (for example, *Tyobu Shinto*). Japanese people often compartmentalise their religion, believing and acting as Buddhists or Shintoists or Traditionalists as time and place may direct. Variegated and highly complex cosmologies and theologies result from these factors, and Christian messengers must be prepared to study and respond to local situations. The messages must also take into account the Japanese tendency to lean like bamboo under the influence of the gospel when they hear it, only to retreat to their original patterns when pressures of family and larger society are asserted.

B. Mahayana Buddhism in Japanese Life

A Sankei newspaper poll (1972) revealed that 68 per cent of the population claimed to be Buddhist. Since Mahayana Buddhism is predominant in Japan, we can conclude that a majority of the Japanese people are Mahayanist in their orientation. The same poll indicated that three-fourths of those who indicated that they

were Buddhists did not claim to be knowledgeable in the Buddhist doctrine, or their own sect. From this, we conclude that the faith and practice of the majority of Japanese people are cultural phenomena.

Mahayana is part of the warp and woof of contemporary Japanese life and thought, then, not because the people have chosen that faith but because it has been chosen for them—passed down by generations of revered forebears.

(i) *Family life*

Original Buddhism had a basic individualistic orientation. Even Gautama Buddha left his family in order to search for truth. In Japan, however, Buddhism is intimately related to the household (i.e., household religion centers in the Buddhist god-shelf or altar, *Butsudan*).

In committed households, the husband and father, or the eldest son, has the responsibility for the care and worship related to this god-shelf. Otherwise, the wife and mother or another family member may assume the responsibility. In the average Japanese family, therefore, either the head of the household will lead the family in worship before the Buddhist altar, or some member will represent the household.

The worship ritual includes the lighting of a candle or small lamp, the offering of a small amount of sacred rice, sacred *sake* (rice wine) or water, the burning of incense, the recitation of a prayer, such as *Namu Amida Butsu* ("homage to Amida Buddha")—Amida being the presiding Buddha of the western paradise or pure land—a report on family conditions, and the offering of thanks to the ancestors. It should be noted that for many, if not most, Japanese families this is not simply a hurried and meaningless ritual. It brings the family together in meaningful worship, and it furnishes an occasion for instructing participants in their common heritage, and in the mutual responsibilities involved in being helpful and worthy members of the household.

Religion in Japan is not just a private affair. Neighbourhoods are well organised and furnish a locus for religious as well as other types of activities. Whenever there is an important religious function in the neighbourhood, every household is expected to send at least one representative. Such functions include, for example, the following:

- (a) Neighbourhood prayers (*mura gito*) which occur in local temples at least three times each year (during the third, fifth, and ninth months of the lunar calendar).
- (b) Monthly sutra chanting (*tsukinami kanki*) in the neighbourhood temple.
- (c) Festivals (*matsuri*) such as the Saint Nichireu festival.
- (d) Funerals (*soshiki*) of neighbourhood citizens.

In the large cities where it is much more difficult to maintain close neighbourhood ties, the more strictly temple-centered activities may take precedence over neighbourhood activities as such. But throughout smaller cities and villages where neighbourhood ties are especially strong, these religious activities assume great importance.

(ii) *Temple area life*

Buddhist temples tend to order a significant part of the religious life of the wider area from which they draw both committed and nominal adherents. Such annual festivals as those connected with New Year, the spring and autumn equinoxes, and Obon (a festival involving the return of the spirits of the dead) furnish opportunities for worship, recreation, and various types of interaction. Funeral services and the proximity of cemeteries to the temple grounds insure that people will regularly congregate at these centres of Buddhist religion.

C. A Strategy for Reaching Mahayana Buddhists

In developing a strategy for reaching Mahayanists for Christ, it is imperative that the one doing the evangelizing approach his task with three principles in mind. First, he must assume the responsibility for building bridges to his hearers. Second, he must be prepared to modify his strategy in accordance with differences between the various schools of Mahayana. Third, in all his efforts, his ultimate dependence must be on the Holy Spirit.

(i) *The messenger*

Generally speaking, Japanese adherents of Mahayana have a rather high regard for those who have chosen to walk a "religious path." They usually accept the messenger of Christ as a person of goodwill and integrity (though some may suspect his motives). In most cases, a genuine interest in the people and their culture will serve to break down any such barriers that might exist.

Credibility may well be another matter. In some sending nations today it is quite widely held that anyone who knows Christ and a smattering of biblical truth is qualified to be a cross-cultural missionary. In a sense, this may be true. Peter and John were recognised as untutored non-intellectuals (Acts 4:13). Any Christian can share a simple testimony of that which Christ has done for him. It must be remembered, however, that testimonies of Christians and Buddhists tend to cancel one another out if they stand alone. More is required. Peter and John impressed their audience because of the power and wisdom of their preaching, in spite of a lack of formal education. Paul used his knowledge of the religious faith and practice of his audience at Athens and elsewhere (Acts 17:19, 20).

Due to the difference between the various schools of Mahayana, some adherents tend to be aware of the doctrinal distinctiveness of their faith. But whether they are or not, they expect those who would lead them to be knowledgeable, and even expert. This certainly applies to the Christian missionary who comes from a great distance to bring the message of Christ. But it also applies to national evangelists and pastors. Without an adequate knowledge of both the Christian faith and the local faith he would replace, the Christian messenger will lack credibility and may fail to win a hearing in this Japanese setting.

(ii) *The message*

In Lystra, the apostles were so misunderstood initially that they could scarcely restrain the priest of Jupiter and his followers from sacrificing to them as gods (Acts 14:13-18). In Athens, the philosophers inquired of the apostles, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean" (Acts 17:19,20). Among Mahayanists the Christian message has an unusual potential for acceptance on the wrong basis because of similar emphases on compassion, grace, and faith. At another level, however, the Christian message sounds very strange because it grows out of an entirely different world view. Disdaining superficiality, therefore, the Christian messenger must proceed responsibly by carefully defining his terms, by wisely selecting biblical themes, and by adapting presentation to Mahayanist hearts and minds.

(a) *Definition of major terms*

A leading Japanese pastor recently reported that it required six years of church attendance for him to understand the Christian meaning of sin. It is imperative that the messenger of Christ carefully explain the basic terms of his message by comparison and contrast. Otherwise the meaning of these terms will be reformulated in accordance with the world view of his Mahayanist hearers. After all, the Creator God is not the Eternal Buddha; and the doctrine of the Trinity is very unlike Triple Body teaching; sin is not just bad *karma*, ignorance, or even indiscretion; the Bible is not simply a record of the insights of enlightened men; Christ is not a buddha or bodhisattva, offering merit to the trusting soul; salvation does not mean that we become a god; and *nirvana* is not heaven.

Our formula might well be, "The God who made the world . . ." and we ought not to "think that the [Deity] is like . . ." (Acts 17:24, 29, NIV). Basic terms must be filled with Christian meanings and emptied of misleading Buddhist meanings in a manner similar to the employment by the apostles when they used such terms as *theos logos*, *musterion*, and *pleroma*.

(b) *Selection of subject matter*

A book entitled *The Teachings of Buddha* (Japanese and English) has been placed in many Japanese hotels by a Buddhist association. It is very comprehensive and includes numerous selections from the various Buddhist scriptures, and accompanying expositions on a wide variety of topics—such as the Buddha, karma, prayer, suffering, peace, family, and others. An exhaustive index readily enables the reader to find out "what Buddha teaches" concerning all of these subjects. Finally, the book contains many pages of directions for inquirers, and information on additional

publications. Unless the message of Christ is set in the context of the whole counsel of God, it will seem to the Japanese that Christianity started with Christ and, like Buddhism, is somehow partially divorced from history. Unless the message of Christ is seen to relate to the wider spectrum of Japanese concerns, it will be perceived as something which is unrelated to Japanese life and confined to the interests of a few religiously inquisitive souls, or those who, for one reason or another, have not been able to cope in a highly competitive society. Unless the Christian teaching on topics of Japanese interest is readily available, their patience may wear out during a prolonged period of tutorship in subjects which are of eternal consequence, but not of immediate interest.

A 1978 study of Japanese Christians by Lutheran office of Communication Mass Media Research Center of the Lutheran World Federation indicates the kinds of problems and anxieties they had at the time of their conversion:

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|
| (1) Personal powerlessness | 46.3% |
| (2) Guilt because of sin | 24.4% |
| (3) Broken relationships with others | 21.2% |
| (4) Failure in their occupation or education | 20.9% |
| (5) Illness | 15.8% |

The felt needs of the converts were as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|
| (1) Knowledge of the right way to live | 44.5% |
| (2) An understanding of the true meaning of life | 43.9% |
| (3) True love | 37.9% |
| (4) Concern for the future | 23.5% |
| (5) An understanding of death | 20.4% |

We conclude that in spite of relative affluence, a high level of education, and widespread observance of religious rites, many Japanese are looking for practical solutions and fundamental answers.

Many conclusions could be drawn from these and similar studies. But concerning Christian witness, preaching and teaching, we conclude the following:

(1) As was true for the apostles of the first century, contemporary Christian communicators in Japan need to rethink the subject matter of their preaching and teaching. Major biblical themes, events, and personalities from Genesis to Revelation, as well as the person and work of Christ, must be seen in the framework of God's larger plan for history. In this way, the Christian message will take on new meaning and significance for Japanese people.

(2) Christian communicators should not hesitate to deal with themes which relate to the larger and deeper issues of human existence. Many Japanese are not only willing to hear about a valid life-style, the meaning of life, what happens at the time of death, and what to expect in the future, but they are actually enquiring into these matters. If their Buddhist teachings do not satisfy, let the Christian communicators supply Christian answers.

(3) The Japanese, however, are not only seeking. Like most of the people of the world they are hurting. Practical themes need be developed biblically. After all, what could be more Christian than the biblical teaching on such themes as "How to Overcome Loneliness," "Who Can Forgive and Forget Sin?", "Power for Everyday Living" and "The Secret of the Happy Home"? Of course, it is imperative that communication strategy in Japan deal with such topics as repentance, conversion, judgment, and the cross of the believer, but such topics are usually best dealt with in connection with the approaches suggested above.

(c) Adaptation of materials

After taking a course in cross-cultural communications, one Japanese pastor confessed that, for five years, he had been preaching Western sermons to Japanese audiences. We should not be surprised. He was won to Christ by a Western missionary. He was educated in Western theology. His library contained a preponderance of Christian books that originated in the West.

East or West, the Christian message must be the same in its essence. But it must be different in the way it is "packaged."

Consider the following way in which a Japanese evangelist presented the message of Christ to a Japanese audience during the Obon festival season:

"My friends, do you know the origin of Obon? It is said that the mother of Mokuren, one of Buddha's disciples, died. Mokuren pled the Buddha for permission to see her in the netherworld. After repeated urgings, Buddha complied. Mokuren was horrified to see his mother hanging upside down and asked what he could do to relieve her suffering. Buddha said, 'Take her down and give her food and drink.' That was the beginning of Obon. Obon means to hang upside down.

"And that is why each year about this time millions of Japanese invite dead family members to return to their home for food and fellowship. And then what do they do? After three days, they send them back to the world of suffering. What a cruel thing to do!

"My good friends, I have good news. Almost 2,000 years ago, Christ, the divine Son of the true and living God, hung upon a cross and there he died. Do you know why? He died on the cross so that you need never suffer in the world to come..."

This is adaptation. It is taking scriptural truth and clothing it in cultural form so that its relevance is preserved in the Mahayana context of the Japanese people!

(iii) The manner

The manner or style in which one presents the gospel to a Japanese audience is extremely important. It is not necessary to belabor this point, but relating to their Buddhist orientation, it is important to stress three dicta of sound stylistic strategy.

(a) "Preserve the majesty."

The greatness of God and his gospel must be preserved at all costs. Believing Buddhists stand in awe of the greatness and goodness of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even skeptical Japanese refuse to denigrate and usually reverence them. Therefore, to deal with God's truth in a flippant manner, to refer to him with inappropriate language, and to address him in an unthinking and irreverent fashion is to lower him in the full gaze of our Buddhist friends who, like Isaiah, need to see him "high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1).

(b) "Retain the mystery."

There is a certain mystery about the Christian message. It contains sacred secrets, now revealed. It is so simple that a child can receive it, so profound that all the wisdom of the world could not have authored it. A reading of the sutras and an acquaintance with the Japanese people dictate that, in communicating the gospel, we communicate both its simplicity and its profundity. Without the latter, it becomes difficult for the Japanese to appreciate it. Without the former, it becomes impossible for them to embrace it.

(c) "Reveal the validity."

It is a matter of debate in Japan as to whether one gets to the head through the heart, or to the heart through the head. The debate may never be resolved, for all depends on the particular audience and situation. It is noteworthy, however, that, in the Sankei Newspaper poll mentioned above, 67 per cent of those polled said that they would change religions if some religion other than their own were shown to be true. This would seem to indicate uncertainty concerning the validity of their own religions. It also indicates that the Japanese need valid reasons-theoretical and practical-for accepting a religious faith.

(iv) Method

When we consider evangelistic methodology in Japan, it must be said that, due to the freedom accorded the church and missions since World War II especially, a wide variety of evangelistic methodologies have been employed. Nevertheless, Christians of all persuasions comprise barely one per cent of the population. On the one hand, many church leaders have grown pessimistic, and some say that we are approaching the "sunset of missions" in the "land of the rising sun."

On the other hand, many national leaders are optimistic about the open doors, and missionary activity continues to be significant. This is an opportune time, then, to review the record and make a re-appraisal.

(a) Successes and failures in the past

The reason for the limited success of missions and churches in Japan are many. Some of the most important ones include the following: a lack of understanding of Japanese religious traditions; disregard for sociological structures, especially that of the family; the inroads of liberal theology; the pastor-centered structure of the churches; the failure of pastors to lead their people in evangelistic outreach; the inability of many missionaries to adjust their approaches to the Japanese context; the isolation of many Christians from their communities; the conflict or lack of effective co-operation between churches and para-church movements; and one-sided theological training with an overemphasis upon an analytical, academic approach to the Bible and Christian ministry.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that in his grace, God has granted times of revival and ingathering in the past: the Doshisha Revival in the 1880s; the Twentieth Century Forward Movement in 1901-04; and the Oriental Mission Societies Holiness Revival in the 1930s. Nor should we forget the impact of more recent efforts such as the Kingdom of God Movement and Total Mobilization Evangelism, and the emphasis upon church planting and church growth.

A 1976 study of eight rapidly growing churches (located in different types of localities and having a high percentage of converted Buddhists) by Paul Ariga pointed up some important factors which contribute to growth. Common to all eight churches were the following factors: the vitality that results from a continual and obvious dependence upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the congregation; a sincere commitment to the task of evangelism on the part of the people; a willingness on the part of the pastor to take the lead in a programme of outreach; the formation of concrete growth goals on the basis of study and faith; the establishment of multiple meeting places in order to reach more people; and periodic evaluation of progress in the task.

(b) Evangelistic methods and Japanese society

Christian novelist Shusaku Endo writes that the Christian community in Japan was obliterated in the seventeenth century, not because of prohibitions or persecution but because there is something about Japanese society that is resistant to the Christian faith. Isaiah Bendasan says, "There are no real Christians in Japan. They are all Japanese-ans."

Of utmost importance to Japanese people is harmony in human relationships. The acceptance of the individual by the various kinship or other groups of which he or she is a part is of primary import. The individual's decisions are invalid apart from group agreement; his activities are regulated by the group, and his character and conduct are constantly evaluated by the group.

Evangelism in Japan must concentrate upon groups, not just individuals. The World Lutheran Federation study mentioned above revealed that 52 per cent of them had been strongly influenced toward Christ by attending Christian schools, or participation in group activities. The 1976 study of eight successful churches showed that evangelism in group context was most effective: household, extended family, specialized group, "table-side," and Bible camp evangelism. When individuals are converted apart from the primary groups to which they belong (especially the family), they should be prepared as bridges to, and witnesses within, those groups. Radio Pastor, Akira Hatori, was the first to be converted within his kinship group. Subsequently, more than one hundred have become Christians; and at least fifteen are evangelists, pastors, or missionaries.

(c) Evangelism and the preparation of the people of God

Essential to any evangelism strategy is the preparation and involvement of those who are already believers. The preparation should be threefold:

(1) Spiritual preparation

One rapidly growing church in the Tokyo area specifically "targets" people to be evangelized and assigns them to its members. Church prayer meetings focusing on the unsaved are augmented by the personal prayers of the believers for the people for whom they are responsible. With certain exceptions, such as Nichiren Orthodox Sect Soka Gakkai Buddhists, Japanese people tend to be religiously tolerant (until faith threatens group harmony). In this context the kind of spiritual preparation that motivates the believer to win souls and prepares the hearts of unbelievers to be evangelized is especially important.

(2) Scriptural preparation

The plan of still another church for preparing its believers to lead non-Christians to Christ includes a course of study and literature tools, which enable the lay person to be a teacher to the non-Christian assigned to him as well as a witness to him. The Christian is actually introduced to the inquiring individual or group as a friend and teacher who will answer their questions and lead them in an understanding of God's Word, the Bible.

(3) Practical preparation

In addition to spiritual motivation and a biblical orientation, Japanese Christians require the kind of practical training that will enable them to turn characteristic politeness and the unusual number of associations with individuals and groups that is characteristic of Japan into evangelistic opportunities. Believers must be trained and deployed not simply as individual witnesses but as participants in united programmes of outreach centered in the local church.

(d) Evangelism and the conversion process

Referring once again to the World Lutheran Federation study, it was found that considerable time was spent in the "inquiry stage" before the subjects became Christians. More specifically, roughly one-third took one year, one-third took from one to three years, and one-third required more than three years to make the decision to become Christians. Of course, a similar study in another communion might turn out quite differently. But, generally speaking, time and patience are required to lead Japanese in general and Japanese Buddhists, in particular, to Christ. One reason for the unusually high percentage of reversions in Japan likely is the pressures for premature decisions.

A sound strategy of evangelism in Japan, then, must include ways of keeping contact with inquirers over a period of time, and moving them forward in their understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian faith. At the same time, it must include opportunities for definite commitments to Christ.

(e) Evangelism and the mass media

Japan is a media-conscious society and one of the most literate societies in the world. Radio and television, books and other types of literature, Christian films, cassette recordings—all have been successfully utilised in Japan. The Buddhists are as adept in using these tools of propagation as are Christians—and sometimes more so.

It must remain beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate such a multifaceted dimension of evangelism. However, it can be reported that thirty years of experience on the part of the Pacific Broadcasting Association corroborates general research on the role of mass media. Mass media programmes which are carefully related to the witness of local Christians and churches are most effective in bringing Japanese into fellowship with Christ and the congregations.

(f) Evangelism and the local church

Influenced by the tendency toward a closed society in Japan, many churches have become ingrown and have failed to become dynamic forces in their communities. Influenced by the need for intimacy and a sense of belonging, many churches grow until they reach the outer limits of small group size and then level off. (The size of the average Protestant congregation in Japan is forty-four).

Ultimately, the hope of evangelizing Japan is to be found in the spiritual vitality and evangelistic outreach of the Christian congregations. Let them, as some Buddhist groups have done, actually serve their communities in such activities as ministering to the poor and cleaning up public areas. Let them, as did one congregation in Greater Tokyo that has forty-eight home Bible study groups, blanket their communities with cells of Christian outreach. Let them, as numerous churches have done, plant daughter churches in unreached areas by providing prayer and financial support and even a nucleus of believers. And let pastors, as a very few of them have done, be prepared to minister to several smaller congregations, if necessary, delegating more responsibility to the capable laymen and laywomen of Japan who possess such great potential for future growth.

According to a recent issue of the Japan Harvest, one of the most neglected areas of Japan in 1969 was also a Buddhist stronghold—Toyama Ken. For a population of 1,100,000 people it had only fifteen churches! Toyama Ken became a focal point of evangelical concern. Prayer was offered. Plans were made. Workers were sent. Outreach was multiplied. Within the last ten years the number of congregations produced in the first one hundred years of Protestant witness in Toyama Ken has more than doubled. The number of churches now stands at thirty-five.

As we face the task of evangelizing the Japan of today, we must admit as Paul did of his world, "There are many adversaries." But the presence of adversaries must not be allowed to obscure the fact that before us, as before the great apostle, "a wide door for effective service" has opened (1 Cor. 16:9, NASB).

4. Conclusion

The discussions on the schools of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism indicate wide differences exist between them. Furthermore, specific methodology should be developed according to the needs of each particular situation among the variety of Buddhist peoples. It is also observed that some principles for strategy are common to many situations. We conclude with three major comments.

A. Holistic Strategies Necessary

An overall strategy for evangelism which leads to definite church planting should be developed from the start. It should be evaluated regularly at each level, and necessary adjustments should be made to ensure that evangelism leads to the establishing of local churches that continue to witness effectively to surrounding communities.

Such a strategy might include the following broad dimensions:

- (i) Develop an environment conducive to positive attitudes toward the Christian message.
- (ii) Identify receptive families or communities as widespread evangelism and social service are carried on.
- (iii) Saturate peoples appearing to be receptive with concentrated teaching of the gospel.
- (iv) Lead the receptive families and individuals to commitment to Christ as Lord through timely, focused evangelism.
- (v) Start new church cells of these believers immediately following conversion.
- (vi) Nurture the new believers by teaching and practice of the dynamic Christian responsibility.
- (vii) Identify and develop prospective local leaders from within the new church.
- (viii) Stimulate vision and active participation of the members in establishing new daughter churches or cells.

B. Summary of Basic Issues

These principles for strategy should be expanded, but the practical conclusion in terms of the task calls for dealing with three basic issues:

First, the spiritual conflict demands concentrated prayer to break the controlling forces of darkness in the heavenlies. God answers prayer, but demonic forces may hinder and frustrate his answers being appropriated at times (Dan. 9:3-4, 17-23). Pray God will break down these powers and free Buddhist hearts to hear the Word of God through the Holy Spirit. Christians must depend on God and his grace and not be surprised by his sovereign intervention in ways beyond those strategies presented here.

A second factor is the overcoming of the social solidarity which has hindered the establishing and expansion of strong and indigenous churches. This has been a major concern of this paper. Current pressures of socio-economic and political changes in Buddhist lands today may open doors of opportunities to establish stable, viable Christian communities that will help the Buddhist societies find a solution to the pressing problems of life and thereby produce a better social acceptance of Christians by Buddhists.

A third essential is the bold, though humble, proclamation of the gospel to Buddhists. A dynamic encounter with the living Lord, in contrast to the dormant Buddha and the feared spirits, is needed and inevitable. Let those prophetic advocates arise, like Elijah, to demonstrate power encounter, breaking with the spirits. A cultural sensitivity should be welded to incarnational evangelism based on deep biblical foundations. This requires a person-centered approach while maintaining a truth-centered gospel. To find the best evangelistic approaches, experimentation should be implemented speedily.

C. Suggestions for Continued Implementation

Finally, in order to implement the initial suggestions in this report, the following strategies for using it are outlined:

- (i) Existing local study groups in each country should continue to study, implement, and test the suggestions given in the report.
- (ii) Pilot projects to research and develop efficient communication tools such as drama, song, and tracts should be launched. Indigenous illustrations, parables, and proverbs for communicating gospel truths should be collected, published, and used.
- (iii) Attempts to overcome the inertia against valuable innovation among both missionaries and national Christians should be tried. Possibly workshops or follow-up seminars would be helpful. Ways to build motivation to consider effective church planting among Buddhists and to implement strategies must be found.
- (iv) Groups may wish to draw on the expertise of specialists in communication, evangelism, church planting and church growth, in relation to

reaching Buddhists.

(v) Resource centres should be established in each country to facilitate:

- (a) Information flow from the local study and grass roots implementing group within that country.
- (b) Availability of sources, reference books and case studies relevant to reaching Buddhistsâ€”e.g., *Strategy To Multiply Rural Churches: A Central Thailand Case Study* (Amos Smith, Bangkok: OMF Publications 1977).
- (c) Co-ordination of workshops, pilot projects, and appropriate research within that countryâ€”e.g., assigning individual topics for preparation, arranging get-togethers for interaction and response from time to time.
- (d) Cross-fertilization and information-sharing with similar resource centres in other Buddhist lands. For exampleâ€”sharing models in effective evangelization.

Existing evangelistic centres to be used as resource centres are:

- (1) Thailand Church Growth Committeeâ€”Box 432, Bangkok, Thailand
- (2) Kansai Mission Research Centreâ€”2-3-5 Nakajima-dori, Fukiai-Ku, Kobe 651, Japan
- (3) Sri Lanka Information Exchange, c/o Lakshman Peiris, "Sudharsana" Byona Visita, Unawatuna, Sri Lanka

This report calls today's Christians in Asia and missions around the world to a new practical task of dealing with various grass roots issues in communicating Christ so that large pockets of accessible Buddhist populations will be enabled to come to faith in Jesus Christ, and become functional members in his church now and in the decades ahead. Nor should those Buddhist lands closed to direct Christian witness be forgotten. Ways to send forth the gospel to them through written Scriptures and radio, backed by prayer, should be carried on until those doors also are open in God's time.

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